

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent:

Our Genesis story is about the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, who (unintentionally) traded away paradise. I'm not sure they understood what was going to happen for their disobedience to God.

In the story, God created humankind (male and female) in the Divine image - they were made perfect and made to live in the Garden of Eden. Given free reign, God told them they may eat anything in the garden but the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden, or they would die. God told them they would die, but they didn't know what death meant. Adam & Eve were a 'perfect community' - at least the beginnings of one, They had free will and they had a mandate to obey God's instructions. But they fell victim to the serpent's lies...they simply saw the fruit, thought it looked good, so they ate it. And because of their disobedience, they were banished from the Garden of Eden. They threw away their (our) legacy by disobeying God.

Their pride of wanting to be like God as the serpent told them - led Adam and Eve to seek their own will rather than the will of God. From the moment they made the choice to act on their own, they began to experience a separation from God. They traded God's love for their own pleasure.

What we hear in their story is the story of our lives as well...the story of our tendency to act on impulse, the tendency to seek immediate gratification without considering the cost. Each of us, in our own way, has been tempted to act on impulse. None of us are exempt.

Adam and Eve ate the fruit and paid the price. And generations later we continue to do the same thing. We find our own fruit that looks good, so we eat, and we pay the price.

We, on this earth, constitute all different types of Communities. We are different shapes and sizes, different colors, different sexes, different religions, different social statuses, different demeanors (those we love / those we hate).

Last week, we heard Jesus tell us to love one another, even to those who hate us and would do us harm. How many of us follow that mandate? How many of us follow our path to 'be the holy people God calls us to be'?

The season of Lent is the time when we root around in the soul pile piles of our spiritual journeys and deal with anything that goes against what Jesus taught us. It's up to us to steer ourselves back on the right course to God with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is a difference between being tested and being tempted. In the Gospel, Jesus goes to the desert to fast and pray for 40 days. He holds fast to his trust in Abba God and does not let the devil get the upper hand.

He is exhausted, starving, and alone as he struggles with *his* time of temptation and challenge.

Lent is supposed to make us stronger so we will be more like Jesus than like Adam and Eve, as far as temptations are concerned.

What makes the story of Adam and Eve true is not that it accurately describes something that happened somewhere else a long time ago. What makes the story of Adam and Eve a true story is that it describes exactly what life is like here and now—it tells the truth, not just about them, but about us. Over and over, we find ourselves just like them—forced to decide what to do with something which, on the one hand, looks really good, seems useful and popular, and that just might teach us a thing or two—but which we strongly suspect is not what God knows is best for us. And we have to choose. When that happens, it's better to be stronger and to have developed some strong spiritual habits.

Jesus has fasted and prayed for a long time, and he's famished, exhausted, worn out, beat up from the weather and the loneliness and the effort it takes to sustain something like his desert experience.

He's not at his best. His physical, mental and spiritual strength have been taxed to their limits. He's used all that up in just being faithful to the fast. *This* is when the temptations hit Jesus.

He might have told parables or asked clever and insightful questions right back at Satan, Instead, he uses the scriptures to put the devil on the spot.

We know about this, too—this is a different sort of temptation from the one Adam and Eve faced...when we face strong, or compelling, or addicting, or just plain hard, temptations and we have flat run out of resources.

No matter how strong we were to start with, we simply can't any longer move in the direction we have chosen to move, and we are pulled instead along lines that are against our will but defined by our appetites and our ego. It's not just a matter of not being strong enough; it's a matter of being empty. That's where Jesus was—he was famished; he was out of gas and he was tempted, really tempted.

Jesus does not say one word of his own. Instead, he quotes scripture in a simple and straightforward way that is unlike how he uses scripture virtually anywhere else in the Gospels.

Jesus has no words, no resistance, no strength of his own—he's simply holding on to God, and letting his words and God's mind come through him.

Jesus' response to the tempter is not a victory of personal, spiritual strength. His time in the wilderness gave Jesus the insight and the courage to surrender, and so to depend, not on his own best efforts, but on an emptiness that can only be filled by the Abba God, and that can only be filled by a gift of grace.

At the end of the day, spiritual life is never about us, about what we can and cannot do. At the end of the day, it's always about God, and about God's gifts that do not fail. May our Lenten journey bring us closer to a bright, new Easter beginning.

Deacon Gregory J Cecere

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